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ABSTRACT

The five Education Department (ED) programs described in this paper provide services that are like those of Regional Education Laboratories in some ways, and unlike them in others. The laboratories are expected to achieve efficiencies by providing most of their help indirectly, by working "with and through" other agencies and organizations engaged in work related to educational improvement. Descriptions of the five ED programs include each program's funding level, purpose, activities, clientele, and requirements for coordination with other service providers and for evaluation. The review indicates that indirect service as practiced by the Regional Educational Laboratories appears to be a unique phenomenon in ED's technical assistance activities. The other assistance programs typically touch base with some other assistance-oriented agency, most often a State Education Agency; they coordinate their work with that of others (chiefly to avoid duplication of services); and they may achieve efficiencies by training trainers or identifying and disseminating models. An analysis of these and other contrasts between the laboratories and ED's other assistance programs is presented. (JD)

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LABORATORY POLICY PAPER

A COMPARISON OF SERVICE MODES IN ED'S (THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

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This is one of several papers about the regional laboratory program, or functions which laboratories perform, which the Office of Educational Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education has commissioned. The purpose of the papers is to assist planning for the 1990 recompetition of awards to operate regional laboratories. This paper has been written under contract to the U.S. Department of Education. No endorsement by OERI or the Department of Education should be inferred.

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This paper discusses several programs of technical assistance funded by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Its original purpose was to draw lessons from these programs that might illuminate issues in the provision of "indirect service," which is a strategy devised for regional laboratories. The last request for proposals (RFP) for laboratories defined this strategy of promoting educational improvement by working "with and through" other agencies and organizations engaged in work related to improvement. The laboratories are expected to forge relationships with these potential partners and make a contribution to their work. The original rationale for this strategy was that the limited resources available for laboratories could hardly support a very broad--but desirable--mission of improving education in the many states, school districts, and schools within a region. Rather than make difficult and inevitably unfair choices among the many clients that could potentially benefit from their direct help, the laboratories are supposed to achieve efficiencies by providing much of their help indirectly.

As the reader will see, lessons about indirect service are few and far between in these other assistance programs. Instead, my analysis shows that the basic purposes, clientele, and philosophy of ED's other large assistance programs are quite different from those of laboratories. Identifying the differences helps to underscore the difficulty of the charge to laboratories. The idea of providing indirect service is itself a challenge to the laboratories--one without a counterpart in the other large programs reviewed here.

ED-Funded Assistance Programs

The five ED programs described in this paper provide services that are like those of laboratories in some ways and unlike them in others. As a basis for analyzing these similarities and differences, particularly with respect to indirect service, this section describes the basic features of each assistance program. Included are the program's funding level, purpose, activities, clientele, and requirements for coordination with other service providers and for evaluation. The principal source of information on the design of each program is its most recent RFP or program regulations, in which the federal sponsor outlines the expectations for contractors. In some cases, the current program design reflects changes over time. These are also described, along with any evidence from prior program evaluations concerning the program's past performance. (Such evidence is very sparse for these programs, however.)

Multifunctional Resource Centers

A total of $10 million supports the 16 Multifunctional Resource Centers (MRCs), which provide assistance to their regions in the education of children with limited English proficiency (LEP). They give priority to assisting projects funded under the federal Title VII program, which supports both bilingual programs and alternate instructional approaches for LEP students. In addition, MRCs may help projects that do not have federal funding but that are specifically designed for LEP students.

The word "multifunctional" identifies the responsibilities of these centers as more wide-ranging than those of their predecessors, reflecting a reorganization of technical assistance in bilingual education that took

place in 1983. Before that time, ED funded three types of assistance providers: Bilingual Education Service Centers; Evaluation, Dissemination, and Assessment Centers; and Materials Development Projects. In congressional testimony and in the first RFP for multifunctional centers, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs expressed the view that this array of service providers had several disadvantages: school districts and states had too many different organizations to turn to; duplication of services occasionally took place; and local needs were not always clear to the assistance providers (Kutner & Pelavin, 1987). The new centers, then, were expected to provide a more coherent focus on local needs.

The RFP identifies the multifunctional centers' primary clients as individuals "participating or preparing to participate in" classroom instructional projects in bilingual education. Accordingly, the centers emphasize training. The RFP requires each center to expend at least 50 percent of its total effort "in providing technical assistance and training to projects and LEAs to implement program improvement activities and/or to upgrade teacher performance in specific content or subject areas." The instructions in the RFP focus the MRCs on directly serving school districts and the individuals within them--answering questions, providing aid and guidance, and presenting workshops relevant to teacher performance. They also direct the centers' mission toward program improvement and the upgrading of local performance.

While the MRCs are expected to assist and train teachers at the local level, they have formal relationships with contact people at the state level. For each state in which an MRC works, it negotiates a written letter

of agreement with a state contact person, spelling out specific collaborative activities between the MRC and the SEA and specifying the procedures the MRC will follow in contacting school districts. Negotiations with the SEA are intended to ensure that the MRC's services do not duplicate or supplant services that the state provides. Early in each contract year, a Regional Coordinating Meeting brings together the state Title VII coordinators, state contact people, MRC project directors, and the federal project officer for a discussion of area concerns and plans.

The RFP also gives the MRCs instructions about coordinating their work with other assistance providers--primarily the other organizations that Title VII also funds to provide assistance. The MRCs' written plan for service delivery must contain plans for coordination with their fellow MRCs, the Evaluation Assistance Centers (EACs), and the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE). They refer clients to the EACs or NCBE when those organizations can meet local needs. Their relationship with the EACs is addressed in some detail in the RFP, which tells them they may follow up EAC assistance, refer state and local clients to the EACs and obtain referrals from the EACs, collaborate on dissemination, and cosponsor inservice training. It prohibits them from providing the assistance with evaluation that the EACs are authorized to provide, unless they first coordinate with the EAC and obtain federal government approval.

Evaluation is decentralized in this program. In an annual performance report, each MRC is to summarize its activities and accomplishments, with attention to users' responses and other major outcomes. It must also develop ways to integrate evaluation results into its future operations.

Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act: Regional Centers

The five regional drug education and prevention centers receive annual funding of $8.8 million under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. Most funds under this act go to states for local projects to be conducted by school districts and other organizations, but 4.5 percent of the total funds are earmarked for the regional centers.

Regional centers for the prevention of drug abuse have existed since 1972, but the most recent competition for funding broadened their mission beyond their traditional one of training "school teams." In the past, the great bulk of center activities consisted of residential workshops in which a team from each participating school learned to work together to develop its own approach to the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. The new RFP continues to include the training of school teams as a focus but adds other activities designed to assist SEAs, school districts, and institutions of higher education, as well as evaluation and dissemination of information.

For SEAs, the centers must provide training and assistance related to assessing problems with substance abuse, developing and enforcing school policies, helping districts and schools with their own programs, and improving coordination among substance abuse programs.

At the local level, the centers are to develop relationships between school districts and institutions of higher education, focusing on the training of education personnel. They are also to assist in locally based preservice and inservice training programs in the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse.

Centers are also instructed to develop methods for evaluating the effectiveness of prevention programs. They are to evaluate their own

activities for their effectiveness in eliminating substance abuse, and to identify and disseminate model programs and strategies developed elsewhere. They are also told to assist their state and local clients with evaluation and the use of evaluation findings.

The RFP specifies some procedures for the centers to use in coordinating services. One is to create an advisory structure that represents SEAs, school districts, institutions of higher education, law enforcement, and governors, and to consult with these advisors not only about needs and service strategies but also about "ways to ensure equity in selection of clients and in delivery of the center's services." In addition, the centers' activities are to be coordinated with other efforts to combat substance abuse at the local, state, national, and regional levels.

After an external review of the centers' activities conducted in 1987 sharply criticized the way they evaluated their work, the new RFP specified the centers' obligations in evaluation. Previously, the centers used a variety of noncomparable instruments to assess the effectiveness of their training, and long-term followup with the school teams was rare (Kutner, Pelavin, Pelavin, and Celebuski, 1987). As a result, little was known about the effects of their work. The new RFP requires each center to evaluate its own activities with "precision and objectivity" and to furnish information for an overall ED evaluation of the centers. This overall evaluation is expected to determine (1) whether the centers are carrying out their activities appropriately and effectively, (2) the extent to which they are reaching the intended clients, (3) the quality of their products and

services, and (4) the effects on efforts to eliminate and prevent substance abuse.

Desegregation Assistance Centers

With $8.2 million in annual funding, the 10 regional Desegregation Assistance Centers (DACs) assist local school boards with the preparation, adoption, and implementation of desegregation plans and the development of solutions to desegregation-related problems in education. The DACs exist by authority of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the past, ED funded specific centers to deal with desegregation issues related to race, national origin, and sex. The current DACs combine all these areas of focus, with the result that the 10 DACs carry out work that 40 more specialized DACs did before 1987.

Upon request from a school board, a DAC may provide information, advice, assistance, and training for school staff, students, parents, and community members. The DACs are prohibited from providing assistance without a request from a school board or other responsible government agency.

The Civil Rights Act also authorizes SEAs to provide help with desegregation-related problems, and many SEAs are funded to carry out activities like those of DACs. The DACs are to coordinate their assistance with that of the SEAs. In cases where a government agency asks both the DAC and the SEA for help, the DAC must develop plans to prevent duplication of assistance. The program regulations also suggest that collaboration with other agencies may be a useful part of this program, since applicants receive points for "past successes in ... collaborating with other individuals and organizations."

DACs are expected to have evaluation plans that "to the extent possible, are objective and produce data that are quantifiable." Findings from these evaluations have not been compiled across centers in many years, and the program has had no external evaluation since 1976. (A contractor produced a "descriptive overview" in 1985 but drew no conclusions about the effects of DAC activities.)

Regional Resource Centers

Six Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) receive a total of $6.7 million to assist states in carrying out the Education of the Handicapped Act. Since 1977, the RRCs' chief purpose has been to assist in program development and implementation; before that time, the centers had the very different purpose of testing and serving individual handicapped children. As national needs and priorities in special education have changed, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has given the RRCs specific instructions for their program focus, often in response to new legislative provisions.

In their current work with SEAs, the RRCs must be able to address two widespread problems identified by OSEP: SEA monitoring, and implementation of the requirement to serve handicapped children in the least restrictive environment (LRE). In addition, OSEP has told the RRCs to help their clients with issues in three areas: (1) the transition from school to work and adult life, (2) parent involvement in educational decisionmaking, and (3) infant, toddler, and early childhood services.

The activities of RRCs include consulting with SEAs in defining problems and solving them, conducting workshops and conferences that link SEAs with other professionals and parents, and synthesizing and disseminating information. They also help in developing, identifying, and

replicating successful local programs and practices. If an SEA asks an RRC for help with the procedures and format for a grant proposal, the RRC may provide such help.

The RRCs work predominantly with SEAs. They meet with the SEAs in their region to develop a joint planning report, which provides a detailed summary and ranking of each SEA's technical assistance needs, and an assistance agreement for each SEA consistent with its priority needs. The processes of needs assessment and planning are not entirely directed by the states, however. OSEP representatives participate in the joint planning meetings, and they assist in determining state needs and priorities.

A seventh contractor called the Federal Regional Resource Center (FRRC) has recently been established to assist the RRCs. Its purposes are to ensure consistency in the content and strategies of technical assistance across regions and to ensure coordination of services among the RRCs and with other federally funded projects.

OSEP prescribes procedures for evaluation and reporting that are designed to track not only activities but also client-level outcomes. The RRCs submit quarterly reports on the assistance they have given to states. They must also design and carry out a system of impact assessment, under which they are to identify changes in educational services or administration that result from each of their technical assistance activities.

Technical Assistance Centers

Under Chapter 1, the federal compensatory-education program, six Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) receive $3.6 million to assist SEAs and school districts with Chapter 1 evaluation and program improvement. The TACs were originally set up under the Education Amendments of 1974, which

prescribed a new, elaborate evaluation and reporting system for compensatory education and which offered TAC assistance to ease the work of carrying out these evaluation requirements. Over the years, their emphasis has shifted away from the technical aspects of evaluation (although that remains one part of their assistance repertoire) and toward program improvement--on which the government now requires them to spend half of their effort.

The TACs provide most of their assistance in the form of workshops, responses to telephone inquiries, and some onsite assistance. In evaluation, they help SEAs and school districts on such topics as testing procedures, development of microcomputer databases, and coordination of Chapter 1 testing with the testing that the districts or states administer to all students. Their workshops and other assistance on program improvement emphasize the use of local evaluation results and effective-schools principles to inform improvement efforts; for example, closer coordination between Chapter 1 services and the regular school program is often a topic of assistance.

The TACs work with SEAs in planning and delivering their assistance. They negotiate a letter of agreement with each SEA in the region, which specifies what the TAC will do at the state and local levels and how it will contact school districts. (Some SEAs take the lead in contacts between the TAC and the districts, while others simply ask to be kept informed about what the TAC is doing with districts.) TAC staff members often make presentations to groups of local educators at workshops that the SEAs organize. The TAC's primary contact person at the SEA is typically someone in the state Chapter 1 office, although in some states TACs also work closely with state evaluation personnel.

The RFP for TACs requires coordination of efforts across TACs and with other assistance providers in the region. However, because the TACs' mission is so focused on Chapter 1 issues, the work of other assistance providers is seldom closely related to it.

The TACs are required to report on their activities but not to evaluate them. They keep a record of topics on which they provide assistance and of "client hours" of contact (a figured derived by multiplying the number of clients attending an event, such as a workshop or onsite assistance session, by the length of the event). They submit narrative reports on a quarterly and annual basis.

Indirect Service in These Programs

By and large, the programs described here are geared to the provision of direct service. They offer workshops, consultation, training, and answers to questions--mostly delivered directly to administrators and teachers in instructional programs. None of them has a charge resembling the laboratories' charge to work "with and through" other organizations in the indirect pursuit of improvement.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a few respects in which these other assistance providers might be said to provide indirect service.

Presence of "Gatekeepers"

With the exception of the centers funded under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, these assistance providers are told by their federal sponsors to negotiate their assistance plans with contact people in specific agencies. The DACs are told that they must await requests from school boards or other responsible government entities. For the bilingual MRCs, the RRCs for the handicapped, and the Chapter 1 TACs, the designated contact

people are in SEAs--almost always in a federally funded program office. In all these cases, any services provided to local educators must be cleared in some way with the gatekeepers that the federal government has identified. The idea is to maintain identifiable points of control over the services offered and thus to ensure a degree of responsiveness to a set of primary clients.

The three assistance programs for which the SEA is a gatekeeper vary in the extent to which their services could be called indirect. The RRCs for special education are the farthest from the indirect model. They exist primarily to provide direct support to the SEAs themselves, responding to ED's priorities as well as those of the SEA, and only to a limited extent do they work through SEAs to offer assistance at the local level. For both the bilingual MRCs and the Chapter 1 TACs, the negotiation of state-level plans is partly a matter of protocol--a way of allowing the SEA to suggest priorities for local service and to specify the procedures for making contact with local school districts. The states vary in the amount of direction they give to these assistance providers. In addition, both of these assistance programs do one thing with SEAs that could correspond to a notion of indirect service: they present workshops at SEA-sponsored conferences.

Because they are told to work with contact people in SEAs, and because these contact people typically receive federal funding to administer a particular federal program, these three assistance programs are integral parts of a vertical network running from ED through the SEAs to school districts. The Chapter 1 TACs illustrate this vertical arrangement. They work closely with the SEA Chapter 1 directors, and their local contact

people are typically Chapter 1 directors as well. While their workshops may address the coordination of Chapter 1 and regular services, non-Chapter 1 personnel like principals and classroom teachers are not really their clients. Adherence to the program's legal and regulatory requirements is a theme running through TAC assistance. Indeed, although the TACs are sponsored by ED's Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation, one of the services they perform for SEAs and districts is to convey and interpret messages from ED's Office of Compensatory Education. Similarly, both the bilingual MRCs and the handicapped RRCs do their planning in meetings that bring together officials from SEAs and from ED's program office.

In short, then, the assistance providers' relationship with state-level gatekeepers tends to reinforce their focus on issues that are central to a particular federal program (as implemented in each state). As I will discuss below, one result is a convergence of mission within each program that contrasts with the divergence that the laboratories experience in their service requests from clients.

Coordination with Other Assistance

ED requires all these assistance providers to coordinate their work with that of others. This requirement does not generally involve working "with and through" others, however. Instead, the dominant idea is to prevent duplication of effort. A typical federal mandate is the one given to the desegregation assistance centers, which are told to make sure they do not duplicate services that the SEA provides to any particular school district.

Probably the closest resemblance to indirect service is found in the instructions to the bilingual MRCs. Unlike the other assistance programs,

which have quite global requirements for service coordination, the MRCs are told explicitly that they should refer clients to the Evaluation Assistance Centers and the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education when either of those contractors could fill a client's needs. (This may reflect the fact that the MRCs' sponsors have given considerable thought over the years to the interrelationships among the various assistance providers they support.)

One activity for the regional centers for the prevention of substance abuse does involve promoting ties between local school districts and other service providers. These centers are told to work with districts and with institutions of higher education to strengthen the ties between them and thus promote continuing preservice and inservice training for local educators.

For the most part, though, the federal RFPs address the matter of coordination by telling contractors how to ensure that their assistance does not duplicate anything else that is offered--especially anything else that is federally funded. These requirements appear to stem from concerns about waste and about possible turf disputes. For example, both the bilingual MRCs and the desegregation DACs are told to make sure that their services do not duplicate those of SEAs. The MRCs are also prohibited from doing what the EACs are authorized to do, unless the project officer gives them prior approval.

Not surprisingly, coordination is not an active focus for the work of these assistance providers. Studies of the predecessors of the current MRCs and TACs have shown few or no activities that could be characterized as coordination (Kutner & Pelavin, 1987; Reisner et al., 1988). The data on

the TACs, which I helped to analyze, showed that most TACs viewed other assistance providers in their regions as their likely competitors for future contracts, and that therefore they avoided sharing much information with these organizations. Moreover, the federal concern about duplication of effort appeared overblown, at least for the TAC program. Compared to the magnitude of needs in school districts, federal and state resources available for technical assistance are much too small to create a danger of redundancy.

Training of Trainers

In general, these assistance providers offer training for local educators. (The exception is the RRCs, which basically provide training and support to SEAs.) To some extent, the organizations that serve local staff may choose to increase their own efficiency by training people who are in a position to train others. This is not a federally mandated strategy, however. There is no evidence on the extent to which it takes place.

Identification and Dissemination of Model Practices

The development, identification, or dissemination of model practices is not indirect service. In a sense, it represents an alternative to indirect service, since it is another strategy by which an assistance system with limited resources can achieve efficiency. Its popularity in the assistance systems discussed here appears to be growing.

For example, the regional centers for the prevention of substance abuse previously took the approach of working intensively with teams from participating schools. The emphasis was on effective ways of identifying problems with drug and alcohol abuse in a school, bringing community resources to bear, and designing and carrying out solutions tailored to the

problems. Data from clients indicated great satisfaction with this approach but also an interest in knowing more about proven models for the prevention of substance abuse (Kutner et al., 1987). At the same time, a more general analysis of federal efforts to prevent drug abuse indicated a lack of knowledge about what strategies work (GAO, 1987). The result has been a new emphasis in the latest RFP on the identification and dissemination of effective models. The centers are also supposed to assist their clients in evaluation, thus adding some rigor to the determination of the models' effectiveness.

In the early 1980s, the TACs often worked with districts that were seeking recognition under a special federal initiative that identified effective Chapter 1 programs. Although this effort has become more routinized and now demands less attention from the TACs, the model practices identified through this initiative remain part of the TACs' repertoire. They often serve to illustrate the principles that the TAC staff emphasize in their workshops and consultation on the subject of program improvement. Data from clients show that state and local Chapter 1 directors are very interested in knowing more about effective models (Reisner et al., 1988).

The identification and dissemination of model practices is also part of the mandate for bilingual MRCs and handicapped RRCs. Methods of identifying models and criteria for determining their effectiveness are not specified.

Conclusions

This review indicates that indirect service as practiced by the laboratories appears to be a unique phenomenon in ED's technical assistance activities. The other assistance programs typically touch base with some other assistance-oriented agency, most often an SEA; they are told to

coordinate their work with that of others (chiefly to avoid duplication of services); and they may achieve efficiencies by training trainers or identifying and disseminating models. In all these respects, the intended outcome is to make the most of limited resources by avoiding confusion or wasted effort. However, in none of these programs is there a central focus on cultivating relationships with an array of organizations as an alternative to working directly with educators. I turn now to an analysis of this and other contrasts between the laboratories and ED's other assistance programs.

Peculiarities of the Laboratory Program

I come away from this research on technical assistance systems with a new appreciation for the unusual challenges that laboratories face in carrying out their ambitious assignment. The contrasts between laboratories and ED's programmatic systems of technical assistance provide a way of illustrating these challenges.

The Laboratories' Mission Is Diffuse

While it is obvious to say that school improvement is a broad and amorphous mission, the contrast between that mission and those of ED's other technical assistance providers is dramatic. Three of the five large programs reviewed here--the bilingual MRCs, the handicapped RRCs, and the Chapter 1 TACs--derive their focus from federal categorical programs. They are supposed to promote improvement in the services underwritten by a specific funding source. (The MRCs may also assist LEP programs that do not receive federal funding, but their purposes must be consistent with those of Title VII.)

The two remaining programs have missions focused around particular societal problems. Substance abuse and school segregation are officially recognized evils for which the federal government provides remedies, and technical assistance is one remedy. When school districts and schools have difficulty in preventing substance abuse or solving the problems that arise in desegregation, they may call on these assistance programs for technical expertise.

The TACs' history provides a further illustration of the specificity inherent in most technical assistance systems' missions. Originally established to help SEAs and districts carry out a particular system of evaluation and reporting, the TACs have only gradually carved out a mission that extends as far as the quality of the Chapter 1 program. As a result, the use of evaluation findings as a starting point for program improvement is an anchoring theme for much of the TACs' work. Thus, these contractors' mission is limited not just to Chapter 1 improvement but, by history and custom, to a particular philosophy of improvement. The tangibility of mission that this offers to assistance providers and clients alike is important.

With a broad mission, deciding what to do and what not to do is a continuing dilemma. The assistance providers whose missions are more circumscribed than that of the laboratories do face choices, but the priorities of the federal program office or of clearly identified clients help them in making these choices. In particular, clarity about who their clients are is helpful, and that is the next point of contrast with laboratories.

The Laboratories' Clients and Partners Are Diverse

For a programmatic system of technical assistance, the primary clients and primary working partners are clearly identified. An MRC director needs good working relationships with state Title VII directors; an RRC director with state directors of special education; and a TAC director with state Chapter 1 directors. The state contact person may be a difficult partner, and the assistance provider may have to negotiate around tensions between the SEA and the federal program office, but at least the cast of characters is well specified. For all these systems, too, relationships with local districts are coordinated through the state contact person. Services may have to be rationed, but the SEA participates in making the difficult choices about providing or denying service.

The federal sponsors of the problem-focused assistance programs (those concerned with substance abuse and desegregation) have recognized that these programs may face issues of rationing services. The centers for substance abuse prevention are told to organize advisory boards, representing specific parties within the region, to help them select clients. Because the DACs are prohibited from soliciting clients, selection is less likely to be a problem for them. However, they are still told to coordinate services with the SEAs in order to avoid duplication.

In the rare cases where another assistance system might be said to work "with and through" a partner, its natural partners are generally easy to identify. Having a contact person in the SEA program office means, for example, that the SEA is the primary organizer of conferences at which the MRC or RRC or TAC puts on workshops. For the MRCs, which exist alongside other federally funded organizations providing help in the education of LEP

students, ways of cooperating with each of these organizations are spelled out in the RFP.

The Laboratories Are Asked to Demonstrate Effectiveness

Evaluation has not been completely absent from these other technical assistance programs, and for some of them it is becoming an increasing focus of effort. In general, though, their histories have been characterized by a somewhat casual approach to evaluation in contrast to that which has surrounded the laboratories.

Examples of serious evaluation requirements are now found in the handicapped RRCs and the centers for prevention of substance abuse. The RRCs must not only report on their work and accomplishments but must also show links between their technical assistance activities and changes in educational services or administration. The substance abuse centers must evaluate their own work with "precision and objectivity" and also be prepared for an external evaluation of their effectiveness.

For the most part, although the technical assistance programs are required to tell their sponsors what they are doing and what they have accomplished, their accountability for the ultimate effects of their work is somewhat limited. With the exception of the RRCs, they are not asked to track the effects of their work to the level of educational service delivery.

Across the board, the assistance programs seem to lack evaluation techniques that would yield good evidence on their effectiveness. The laboratories, with their base in research and development, might be in a good position to contribute to the state of the art in evaluating technical assistance. A first step would be for the federal sponsors of technical

assistance to acknowledge that better evaluation methods need to be developed.

Concluding Observations

While every technical assistance system funded by ED has a characteristic personality, that of the laboratories stands out dramatically from the others. To sum up the advantage that the other systems have over laboratories, there is something to be said for knowing what you are supposed to do--and with whom. For the laboratories, forging relationships with a broad array of government and professional entities, many of which experience their own shifts in personnel and priorities, requires a level of hard work that the other assistance providers do not have to expend. Achieving a clear identity in spite of a diffuse mission and diverse clientele poses difficulties that can only be compounded by an expectation for rigorous evaluation.

From another point of view, the sweep of ambition for the laboratories is commendable and even exciting. The breadth of their mission permits the use of comprehensive approaches that clients of the other programs do not experience. The other programs' forced partnerships with specific SEA personnel undoubtedly weaken their credibility and effectiveness in many situations (even while strengthening them in others). And ED's growing efforts to hold programs of all kinds accountable for their results will find the laboratories in a better position than those assistance programs that have carried out relatively pro forma evaluations.

With respect to indirect service, few lessons emerge from this comparative analysis of the laboratories and other programs. Since the other programs do not really offer indirect service, they suggest no

principles for laboratories to follow in this area. I can suggest only the common-sense notions that laboratories will probably be most successful with indirect service when they can find partners with (1) a relatively stable commitment to a well-defined program of educational improvement, (2) a lack of in-house capacity to do things that laboratories can do, and (3) no particular ambition to become laboratories in the next funding competition. The lessons that laboratories learn about indirect service will not be of much help to other ED assistance systems as currently constituted, since those systems do not have to provide indirect service and probably would not choose to incorporate it into their work.

In general, indirect service may be most usefully viewed as one of several strategies for increasing the efficiency of technical assistance. Along with training trainers and disseminating model programs, working "with and through" other organizations may be an approach in which an initial investment does yield cost savings over time. After an investment of the time and patience necessary to develop interorganizational relationships, the payoff comes as multiple organizations together build their capacity as assistance providers and develop workable divisions of labor. However, there seems to be no compelling reason to adopt indirect service as the only means of achieving efficiencies.

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